

Still Time To Manage Bagworms

This pest is commonly found in southern Iowa on evergreens such as arborvitae, redcedar (juniper), and spruce, but over the last five years, because of milder winters, it has been seen more often north of I-80. We use to see just a few trees impacted here and there north of I-80, but now we are really starting to see this pest on a regular basis. Small caterpillars hatch in early summer and construct a bag around themselves, using silk and plant parts (needles and/or leaves). By the end of the summer these bags can be up to two inches long.

If this insect is left unmanaged, larger infestations can kill established evergreen trees and shrubs over a period of a few years. The populations of this pest have exploded in southeast Iowa in recent years. The problem with this pest is that most citizens do not notice that their plants are being attacked until the pest has already done significant damage. Bagworms overwinter as eggs in the bag, so a good way to manage small infestations is to handpick the bags this fall and winter and destroy them before next spring. If the infestation is too large to pick all of the bags, consider a registered insecticide which can include Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) or other registered products in early to mid-June, when the new larvae hatch from their eggs. Apply all insecticides according to the label. It is critical that a person goes out in mid to late May to start monitoring for the presence of the new larvae/bags. The new larvae have to be feeding before any type of chemical treatment will be effective.



Mature-sized bagworm on blue spruce



Spruce windbreak trees killed by bagworms